

THE QUIVER

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"The sound that greeted her was an unmistakable sob."—p. 404.

ESTHER WEST.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "PEGGY OGLIVIE'S INHERITANCE."

CHAPTER LIII.—TURNED BACK.

WE must now turn back to the time when we left Mary Potter and her children on board of the doomed vessel, with the faithful Timothy in attendance. As the day went on the confusion around them seemed only to become worse confounded, and Mary, with her girls gathered around her, and Johnny kept as closely as possible by her side, was fain to sit within the cabin and keep clear of the little world of

chaos which reigned without. Martin and Willie, as well as Bob and Walter, were abroad in the midst of it, and were evidently, especially the latter pair, enjoying the excitement of the stirring scene. From time to time they made their appearance to report on all that was going forward. The two elder brothers, with the laudable purpose of comforting their mother, brought her every agreeable bit of intelligence they could find, the soothing effect of which was generally neutralised by the younger pair rushing in breathless to communicate something of quite the opposite tendency. "An awfully jolly row" was the least alarming of these communications. Mary was glad when the day came to a close, and the sound of carpenters' saws and hammers ceased, even though Timothy Wiggett left the ship with the rest of the visitors. He left, promising to come again in the morning; he was to spend the night in Gravesend for the purpose, and Mary was glad that she was to see his broad, beaming face once more, with its silent but perfect sympathy. Little Mary had continued ill and feverish and fretful. Johnny, too, was unusually dull and heavy. Before night it became apparent that both the children had caught heavy colds, and Timothy Wiggett had proved himself most efficient as a nurse, though he trusted rather too much to the agency of pink bull's-eyes and other wonderful productions of a like order.

Morning came at last, after a distressing night, during which the ailing children had suffered no one in their immediate neighbourhood to close an eye. Little Mary especially had tossed and tumbled and cried and fretted the whole night long, and when the morning came her fair face and neck were red as fire. Her mother suspected what it was, and as soon as possible caused inquiry to be made for the doctor. He was not yet on board, but was coming that morning to inspect the passengers, and Mary was assured that he should see her children first. Timothy Wiggett was there before him, having previously ransacked the town for all the good things he could think of in the way of cakes and confections. But from all good things whatever poor little Mary turned away her head, while Johnny took them, and cried because he found himself unable to devour them as usual.

At length the doctor came, a frank, firm-looking man, who spoke in tones of clear decision, as if accustomed to his will being made law. He had hardly looked at the children when he raised his head, saying, "They must be turned back!"

Mary looked at him as if she hardly comprehended.

"They must be got out of the ship as quickly as possible," he added. "They are both in scarlet fever, and of course they cannot be allowed to go."

Mary took in the idea of her children's danger, but nothing beyond. It was some time before she thought of all which this turning back involved.

"And you, young woman," said the doctor, turning to Sarah, "what is the matter with you?"

"Nothing," faltered the poor girl, who was holding her little brother's head.

But the firm man looked in her eyes and into her mouth, and shook his head over her also. He then gave Mary some directions, and went off to speak to the master of the vessel concerning their immediate removal. Esther came forward, and offered to go with him to see the matter settled. She stated their circumstances briefly.

"It is very hard in this case, certainly," said the doctor; "but I cannot, for the sake of one family, allow a virulent disease to enter the ship, and endanger the lives of one half the passengers."

He spoke as if there was no appeal from his decision; and indeed Esther felt that there was none. The master of the ship was even more peremptory than the doctor. "They must leave at once."

As they arrived at this conclusion, Esther was joined by her elder brothers, alarmed and eager. She introduced them to the doctor, who, on examination, pronounced in their favour.

"They, at least, need not turn back."

All the other members of the family passed in review before this arbiter of their fate, and were one by one pronounced safe, especially as he ascertained that only their mother, and Sarah, and Esther had been in very close contact with the sick children for several days.

It was an excited group that gathered round Mary and the little ones, to decide on what was to be done. With regard to them and to Sarah, no choice was left; they must obey the mandate issued against them, and leave the ship immediately. Orders had already been issued for the return of their passage money, and of everything belonging to them. The question debated was, Should all turn back together and wait for the next ship, or should Martin and Willie, with their two younger brothers, be allowed to proceed, and let the rest follow?

The master of the vessel, who had joined the party in order to expedite matters, and the young men and boys themselves, took the latter view, and urged it strongly on the poor bewildered mother. It was like fighting against fate, this trying to keep her family together, and Mary always went down in a fight with anything. Assured that the children would be well again in a week or two, and that she and they would follow the others in less than a month, she suffered herself to be overruled, and hardly protested when the twins, who had been consulting together, declared their wish to go with their brothers.

"Esther will take care of you, mother," Martin had said. "We can go quite comfortably when we know she is with you."

And Mary made no further opposition. Martin had more power over his brothers and sisters than

she had, and would take as anxious care for their welfare; and for the present she was absorbed in watching the lambs of her flock, over whom the vulture Death seemed to her already hovering.

Timothy Wiggett, who had stood apart during the eager conference, now came forward with his timely aid. It was he who carried little Mary on shore, wrapped in a blanket, and screened from light and air; while Martin, privately informed that the ship would not sail for hours, if at all that day, and allowed to accompany them on shore, on condition of undergoing a process of disinfection, carried his little brother in the same fashion. The parting with the others took place on board the ship, and, in the bustle and excitement, was brief and bewildering—one of those things only half realised at the time, to be felt all the more acutely after, like a sudden wound which is almost painless in the giving.

With difficulty they got a small, plain lodging, no one liking to take fever patients. But a childless widow took them in at last, through Timothy's persuasive powers, which certainly did not lie in his tongue. The children and Sarah were soon in bed, and under a doctor's care, the former slightly, the latter exceedingly, ill, though in appearance the cases had been quite reversed.

Then it was time for Martin to return to the ship, though he lingered to the last. After parting with his mother—and Mary seemed parting from all her children in parting with him—Esther walked down with him to the shore. The fine manly young fellow could hardly keep from crying along the streets. Esther leaned upon his arm as they walked together, their hearts too full for speech.

"You will take care of mother," were the first and almost the last words he said.

She gave the promise he seemed to require, and they wrung each other's hands in silence.

The last Esther saw of him was his tall, slim figure standing up in the boat, and waving good-bye. Her tears fell freely under her veil as she paced the streets back to their lodgings.

CHAPTER LV.

PEACE AFTER STORM.

WHEN the terrible news of the foundering of the *City* came to Mary Potter she was hanging over the sick-bed of her daughter Sarah, who was, indeed, dangerously ill. The children, who had taken the disease in its mildest form, were up and about again, almost as well as ever, while she, poor girl, had progressed rapidly from bad to worse.

When the cup is full it runs over, and the human heart cannot hold more than a certain amount of sorrow; what is over remains unfelt. Great calamities are to be measured by the length of time in which they involve us in suffering, rather than by the intensity of the suffering they cause. Some griefs

stretch their black shadows over whole lives; others but darken a short passage of our history.

Under the grim shadow of that great disaster, Mary Potter will walk to her life's end. She knew not, indeed, how she bore it and lived; for long after she could hardly be said to live, so dead was she to everything about her. Her strength decayed, her beauty withered, she seemed to stoop as if with age, and her beautiful hair became in a few months thin and grey.

Timothy Wiggett was not with them when the shock came. He had stayed as long as he could, and returned commissioned to see Constance Vaughan, and explain to her how matters stood. On his first visit the Vaughans were absent, and on the second he was met by the tidings of the disaster, and turned away because neither father nor daughter was able to see him. The next day he was back at Gravesend, arranging with Esther that the whole family—all that now remained of it—should come to him, as soon as Sarah could be moved. As for Mary, she could take no part in any arrangement, but was helpless as a child.

When Constance learned from Esther herself that she was still in the land of the living, it was with singular feelings of mingled pleasure and pain. To both Constance and her father the tidings came with a fresh shock. It was like tearing open a closing wound. But though it thus for a time intensified their pain, it also roused them to a deeper and more conscious resignation to the will of God. Esther was speedily pressed to take up her abode with her old friends, and her coming back to Redhurst gave a fresh impulse to the sympathy which is the only cure for an overwhelming sorrow to hearts like Mr. Vaughan's.

It was not long before Esther roused herself to look to the future. The money which had come to her, diminished as it had been by the expenses of their outfit, would not long suffice for the whole family, and they could not always trespass upon the kindness of friends. But she could not rouse her mother. She seemed to turn away with a kind of loathing from the future, and from any exertion connected with it.

Timothy, too, was averse to change. "Mary," he said, "was a good housekeeper." Sarah was most useful: it was, in reality, Sarah who did all that was wanted, "and, seeing that he paid them nothing, he had an excellent bargain. The two little chaps counted for nothing; he threw away as much garden-stuff as they required for grub." Thus they went on, and Esther's purpose was postponed from month to month.

It was some time after her return before Mr. Carrington and Esther met. It was natural that a reaction should follow the kind of exaltation that had come upon him. It did follow speedily; but he had been carried by that one high tide of feeling

out of himself for ever. He sank into a state of deep melancholy, but it was a far other and nobler melancholy than he had before indulged in. He went about for a few days looking desperately ill. His mother fidgeted, and, to satisfy her, he saw the family doctor, who looked grave, and prescribed cheerfulness without excitement. He forgot to say where the tonic was to be procured.

One day, Mrs. Carrington came in from her round of morning calls. She found from signs in the hall that her son had returned before her. With her light, brisk step she passed at once into his study. It was on the ground-floor, and she gave no warning ere she entered. To her consternation, the sound that greeted her was an unmistakable sob, and the sight she saw was her son with his head bent, and in utter abandonment, crying like a child. Very much alarmed and distressed, she nevertheless stepped back behind the door, called to him that she had returned, and went away as if she had neither seen nor heard. But as soon as she had given him time to recover himself—for the old lady hated a scene, and, indeed, it was the last thing in the world which her son would have chosen to encounter—she came in again, taking care to enter less softly.

"I was coming up to you," he said, in his usual tone. "See," and he held forth a letter.

It was from Constance, to tell that Esther was safe, was coming back, as it were, from the dead. She had observed no precaution in her announcement, and the shock had been too much for him at the moment. An attack of serious illness followed. The excitement, and consequent depression, which the shock and counter-shock had caused, had brought on a functional derangement of the heart.

Nor was Esther ignorant of his suffering, and its cause: Constance, holding her knowledge no longer as a secret, had told her all. For his sufferings, Esther expressed the truest sympathy; for the cause of them, only a deep regret.

After the first painful interview, which took place as soon as Mr. Carrington had sufficiently recovered, they seemed to meet as friends, and they met thus more and more frequently as the summer advanced. In the midst of the summer splendour of the Redhurst garden they often walked together—"Two wan, sick figures walking alone in the flowery land." Not that Esther was sick, but she was pale with dwelling under the shadow of her own and others' sorrows. As for her companion, it was sorrowful to see him so faded in his youth.

All of a sudden he appeared to revive. The air of the Redhurst garden seemed to furnish the tonic he required. He recovered his cheerfulness, resumed his old interests and his new work with fresh vigour. At first Mr. Vaughan had desired him to come to them for his own sake, now he encouraged his visits, as a means of enlivening the sadness that brooded over the house. He himself was content to go on

under the shadow, but could not bear to see Constance and her friend so grave and sorrowful.

But at length Esther announced her determination of going out as a teacher in a school, in which she was about to place little Mary, and it was on learning this determination of hers that Mr. Carrington spoke out.

It was a soft, sad October day. The leaves were quietly fluttering down one by one. The gossamers in the garden, stretched from shrub to shrub, were strung with tiny beads of dew, and resembled nets of woven pearls. No bird sang, everything was still and mute. Constance was engaged somewhere, and Carrington, by Esther's side, pacing up and down the well-known garden at Redhurst. They, too, were sad and mute, for they were thinking of the past.

"Why should you not wait till spring?" said Carrington at last, somewhat abruptly. It was so long since he had spoken, that Esther had to recollect herself, before she could bring to mind that he was speaking of her resolution to face the world again.

"The longer I stay the more difficult it will be to go," she answered, with a grave smile.

"Why should you go at all?" he said, stopping at the end of their walk, and seeking to meet her eyes. "Esther, my love, be mine."

She did not answer, and her eyes were fixed upon the ground; but at least there was no repulsion in her attitude, and the expression of her troubled face, if grave, was tender; therefore he went on to plead for an answer. He urged her to help him to the new life which her love had inspired—the life of grave and manly effort, and of grave and manly joy.

"I do not ask you," he said, "to share with me a life of selfish pleasure, but one of self-denying work. If it is too early to ask you to forget your sorrow, I will wait—indeed," he added, "I do not ask you to forget it at all, but to let me more fully sympathise with it. If you do not, cannot care for me—"

And his voice plainly told what despair such a sentence would be. He paused and waited.

"I do care for you," she murmured; "but—"

He would not suffer the objection, whatever it might be. "There can be nothing else," he exclaimed, eagerly, "to hinder my happiness. I have loved none but you."

She seemed at these words to shrink from him more than she had done before.

"You shall judge," she said, slowly, "what hinders me." And with a delicate blush on her downcast face she gave him the history of her feelings towards Philip Ward. Beginning at the time when she first knew him, she told her lover of the attraction which Philip had exercised over her, and related what had passed between them at their parting.

Mr. Carrington's face brightened as she went on.

"You never really loved him," he exclaimed.

"But, until lately, I thought I could," she answered,

quickly. "He is so good, so tender, so exalted. It was his face I should have seen in visions if I had gone to that distant land—if I had gone down in that sinking ship."

She raised her eloquent eyes to his face bravely.

"If," he replied. "But now?" and he smiled in triumph as the eyes fell before his. "God knows," he said, as they returned up the walk hand in hand, "Philip is nobler and worthier than I; but you will love me none the worse for having been able to think so tenderly of him. Confess that the feeling is not quite the same—that this is something new."

What was confessed need not be repeated; but in the hearts of both was established the peace of a sure and steadfast love, as they returned to the house together.

And our brave Constance had conquered too, for she rejoiced in the happiness of her friends, as she took her place by her father's side. Her attitude towards him that evening, when they were all together, and the lovers drew near to each other, was like an assurance that she, at least, would never leave him, but find her happiness in his alone.

It was settled that the marriage of Esther and Mr. Carrington should not take place till the spring, and Esther was to remain with her friends till then.

Mrs. Carrington, who liked being generous, especially if opposed in her purpose, made over a large part of her fortune to her son, in his own despite. She had enough for herself; besides, she declared it would embitter her life to see him living in poverty.

Mary Potter could not be brought to part with her children, even to send them to school. She taught them herself, and Mr. Carrington had speedily set at rest Esther's fears for their future. But before her marriage they were provided for in another and most unexpected way. Sarah sought her sister one day, in a state of trembling eagerness, to communicate the great intelligence, that their mother was going to be married again.

It seemed the best thing for her after all. Changed and sorrow-stricken as she was, she was still the same to Timothy Wiggett, and he had promised that she should never be parted from her remaining children, whom he had treated, and would always treat, as his own. And Mary knew that she could trust him, and lean upon him always, and gave her placid consent, which consent was enough, however, to fill honest Timothy's heart with joy as full as it could hold; and the heart in that broad body of his was none of the smallest.

THE END.

THE IDOL-BREAKERS.

I.

AKE the hammers and break them down;
Honour and wealth to the boldest
hand:

Sons, well done! ye have won renown
Of all God's men throughout all your
land.

Lo! the beast-god totters and groans—
Clear you the way, for he cranes and falls—
Ah, Lord God, that these blocks of stones
Should rob Thy praise in Thine own dear walls!

Winds shall scatter them; grind them to dust—
Throughly winnow the Holy Place:

Now it is done, we will pray and trust

Our God will turn us again His face:
Join your heart and your voice with mine—

"Baal is fallen, O God that livest;
Shine down upon us and own us Thine;
We wait the sign that Thou forgivest!"

Lo, the glories that glow above us;
Darkness breaks and shudders away!
Jehovah takes us again to love us,
Smiles and makes us glad in His ray.
God is with us! proclaim it wide:
Prophet and priest, come out of your caves;
Behold, the people flow in as a tide
Shoreward, with growing and louder waves.

Lay the Lamb on the sacred fires;

Hallow afresh the altar-stones;
Tune your lyres, O eloquent choirs,

Awake new strains and divinest tones:
Sing, O people, and freight the air
With subtler balms of Psalm and Hymn,
Till all the hangings shake that bear
The dim, mysterious cherubim.

II.

We are foul temples; year by year

The innermost shrine is dulled, profaned;

The fair white robes show mildew and tear,

The pure gold vessels are crushed and stained.
Scatter, O God, with Thy rod the marts

Where Pleasure and Gain go haggle for dust;
Break down the mammon-god in our hearts
And quench the unholy fires of lust;

And let such melodies fret this vault

That is but the floor of Thine House on high,
That Baalim, awed, shall flee the assault

And down in their depths of darkness, die.
Dwell Thou within us; instil Thine Essence

Into the incense pure and sweet;

And let the Holy Cloud of Thy Presence

Find in our souls a Mercy-Seat.

B.

CHRISTIAN LOVE.

"Love as brethren."—1 Peter iii. 8.



THE Word of God is a perfect rule of life and duty. Any one who aims at a high standard of usefulness and beauty in his life, will find in the Bible a priceless compendium of commands, maxims, reasons, principles, examples, and inducements of many kinds, for his guidance and encouragement.

Among these *love* holds a prominent place as a motive power to a high and beautiful order of life. Love, by the mighty and benign force which it exerts, is even said to be "the fulfilling of the law;" and when exercised on its proper objects, who can doubt the beneficent strength of its moral and spiritual influence? But love, like every other passion, must not be permitted to run wild; it must be restrained and directed. And there are some directions which it will not naturally take, even though the nobleness of the action be quite apparent. It is selfish; and must be cultivated and taught and trained. Human nature says, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy;" but Christ says, "Love your enemies;" and that is perhaps the highest exercise of love. If, then, we are to love even our enemies, how much more our common brotherhood of humanity who are not enemies! and how much more still those who hold the same precious faith with us! We must manifest a deeper and dearer affection towards *them*, than we can be expected to do towards people in general. We are commanded to love them in a peculiar manner—as *brethren*.

Peter's words indicate more than an inconstant sensational feeling, as when something particular in the circumstances of others awakens our pity and sympathy. They indicate a habitual principle, whose constant exercise and manifestation is the natural outflow of a heart revived and renewed by the love of Christ. Love of the brethren is one of the indications of the Christian life. Our hearts must be full of it in all our thoughts about them; our prayers for them warmed by it; our intercourse with them sweetened by it; and our conduct towards them guided by it; and if that be the case, there is not much fear of our going wrong, either in what we say or do regarding them.

They are our brethren—they should be very dear to us. As in a family, if one member suffer, all the rest share in the affliction and are concerned about him; if the character of one be impugned, all the rest are up in arms against it; if a spot alight on the fair fame of one, all the rest feel dishonoured; if one attain to wealth or distinction, all the rest rejoice with him; if he fall into poverty or distress, all the rest assist him to rise again,

and comfort him with ready sympathy: and thus, a united band, they present a tower of strength to the buffetings of the world, and exhibit the beautiful spectacle of dear friends living together in unity and love. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! . . . It is like the day of Hermon, that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore."

Such like should be the family of Christ. Each knows by experience something of the peculiar temptations, difficulties, duties, joys, and sorrows that, in a greater or less degree, necessarily attend the life of his brother; and his heart and hand should be always open with sympathy and assistance. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." Christians, whatever be their nation or tongue, whatever their outward distinction, are closely related. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." They are all the members of Christ, "baptised into one body, and by one Spirit;" and they grievously fail in duty if they do or say what would cause family quarrels. "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice; and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." That is the secret and source of Christian love—a lively apprehension of the love of God in Christ.

The name and reputation of each should be dear to all the rest—Christians of all others should be the last to pick holes in each other's garments; rather when they see a rent in their brother's clothing bind it up with the thread of love; and when evil is nigh or peril threatens, they should all stand firm together as mutual supports, in the union and bond of love. One who loves Christ will naturally expect others who love Christ to love him also—he is taught to expect the countenance of his brethren. If he be poor, he is taught to expect that his richer relations will not overlook his necessities, that so he may abound in the grace of thankfulness. He may be richer in faith than they are, and therefore able to communicate in return, "according to the grace that is given to him"—and his life may glorify God as much or more than theirs. But whether or not, the command is plain, and the promise great: "Thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand, from thy poor brother;" "Blessed is he that considereth the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble." If he be rich, it is expected

that he will not be puffed up, but kindly "condescend to men of low estate," and "use hospitality without grudging." "The rich and the poor meet together; the Lord is the maker of them all"—and Christians have the still dearer tie, that Christ is also the *Saviour* of them all.

As members of the visible Church, Christians of all classes meet on a level when they engage together in the worship of God; and all neglect, and coldness, and keeping of distance, and displays of caste, should be drowned in love there, before the throne of Him whom they adore, whose very name is Love. "If there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: are ye not then partial in yourselves, and become judges of evil thoughts?"

"Let brotherly love continue." Our fellow-Christians are observing our conduct—they expect our love. It is easy to counterfeit that in some degree, and we may deceive them; but God demands it, and that it be sincere: "Let love be without dissimulation;" and also that it be warm: "Love one another with a pure heart fervently;" and this cannot be unless it be kept in continual hearty exercise: nor should we suffer the indifference or coldness of others to affect us. We are to look for their love, but whether they give it or not we are to love them; and that will very likely soon kindle a flame in return. If others fail in duty towards us, that is no reason why we should go and do likewise, and meet them with haughtiness or freezing politeness. That is natural, no doubt; but it is wrong. There is a common aphorism about not making ourselves too cheap to others on occasions like that; but I fear it usually has its root in pride, and is the cause of much estrangement between friends and neighbours. Keeping up our price of reconciliation may make another fear us, but it can never make him love us. "If thy brother offend thee, go and tell him his fault betwixt him and thee alone." What a beautiful and loving and wise method of getting differences settled! How often would a reconciliation take place, and the offence seem but a trifle, if the parties would but speak to one another alone, instead of gadding about and prodding at the sore till it becomes inflamed, and swelled, and malignant. Alas! it is too often the case that, instead of adopting the scripture rule, the one who feels himself offended will not move in the matter. It is the other person's fault, let him first come and acknowledge it; till he does so, the injured one thinks he is at liberty to tattle about it to his acquaintances, and indulge in spiteful remarks and evil insinuations as to the

motives of the other, till what at first was but a molehill becomes a mountain, which it is well-nigh impossible to get over. Oh, if Christians, when they are aggrieved, would just go first of all to the aggressor, before they mention it to any outsider, and when they found opportunity, calmly speak to him about it, *between themselves alone*, how much bitterness and evil feeling might be prevented! "If while walking in the way we meet a brother who will not give us 'the right hand of fellowship,' let us pass on in peace, resolving to keep up the vigour of *our* love, though he has lost *his*." He will by-and-by be ashamed of himself, and ready to meet our next advance in a friendly spirit. Even though he fall into grievous open sin, we are not to turn our backs on him, or pass by gathering in our skirts lest his touch defile us, nor with shrugged shoulders talk with genteel severity about his fall by way of congratulation on our own superior morality. We are to grieve over it as a family dishonour, to screen him if possible from the gaze of the ungodly, who would rejoice, saying, "Aha, even so would we have it," and with unabated love strive to restore him "in the spirit of meekness, considering ourselves lest we also be tempted," and thankful that, by the grace of God, we are what we are. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." The weaknesses and faults of brethren should never damp our love or hold us aloof from them; the more and the greater these are, they just need the more our prayerful sympathy, and pity, and assistance. We are our brother's keeper; and if danger approaches and he is weak, our duty is not to take ourselves out of the way and have nothing to do with him, lest he be overcome and disgrace us, but to surround him like a wall of adamant, and help to roll back the tide of temptation. And we have no right to be severe because temptation has been too strong for him—we do not know the force of it in his case; a wave that breaks harmlessly at our feet may be death to him whose weak point lies right in the way of it. Let Christians stand together for mutual support, strong in the bond of love, each opposing his strength to the influence that might wound a weaker brother. The best of us would find it hard work to keep watch and guard all round, and stand alone in presence of the enemy.

"Love as brethren." If all Christians would but act up to their duty in this respect, what a delightful and heavenly atmosphere would fill God's Church on earth! what a glorious and unbroken front it would present to the world! what happiness would glow in the hearts of Christians themselves! and how many might learn to love Christ by looking on the mutual love of his followers! Let us strive to cultivate the spirit of Christian love more and more: it will make

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ourselves and others much happier. Amiability is always hailed with pleasure; it exerts all around a sweet and genial influence; it has a universal charm. There is neglect, unkindness, and pride enough; there is bitterness, and hate, and envy enough in the world. The heart of humanity has lost its early love, and in its desolation and emptiness clings with unsatisfied longing to the things of earth. It has lost its early love, and now cleaves in blind misery to one cold object after another, till it ends in being dissatisfied with all. It cannot be satisfied without loving and feeling itself beloved. And while we pity and pray for the empty heart wandering in misery

and darkness, let our aim be to walk in the light of the love of Christ, that our sacred brotherhood, the Church of our Saviour, may shine through the gloom like a bright and beautiful star, beckoning the wanderer back to his home, where a Father's welcome and a household's love will make him forget his woe, and ravish his soul with foretastes of everlasting joy. "Love as brethren." "He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him: but he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whether he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes."

J. HUIK.

U N D E R F O O T.

BY ALTON CLYDE, AUTHOR OF "MAGGIE LYNNE," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

MARKED PRIVATE.

PHE blustering March wind seemed to be running riot that afternoon, shaking the windows of the private office of Daniel Crawton, the wealthy principal of the firm of Crawton and Co. Though he was absent, his chair was not vacant, for a young man sat there, his nephew and junior partner, Mark Danson. He was lounging indolently back, softly stroking his sleek, light whiskers, and examining a letter with a look of curious speculation. He sat where his face caught the light. Seen thus, he gave the impression of a good-looking young man, about twenty-six or twenty-seven, not very tall, but stout, and fair-complexioned. It was the physique of one who might be always trusted to carry out the law of self-preservation. The fat, fair face had one peculiarity: it was destitute of colour. Even in moments of passion and excitement the blood seldom showed itself there in a healthy glow. There was the same want of relieving shade, the same dull uniformity of tint, in the eyebrows and hair. Apart from this defect, it would have passed as a tolerably pleasant face, with observers who were not deep students of human character; but to those who could detect them, there were secretive, sinister lines about the mouth, and a crafty, insincere look in the eyes, which had a curious trick of contracting their pupils, and hiding under the dropped lids. Altogether, there was that about the face which ought to have put his friends on the defensive. Yet Mr. Mark Danson was a plausible, fair-spoken young gentleman, who made more way than any one in the favour of his stern uncle, and generally managed to get his character taken upon trust by those about him.

"A woman's handwriting, and marked private," he muttered, slowly turning over the letter, and holding it up for closer inspection; "yes, undeniably

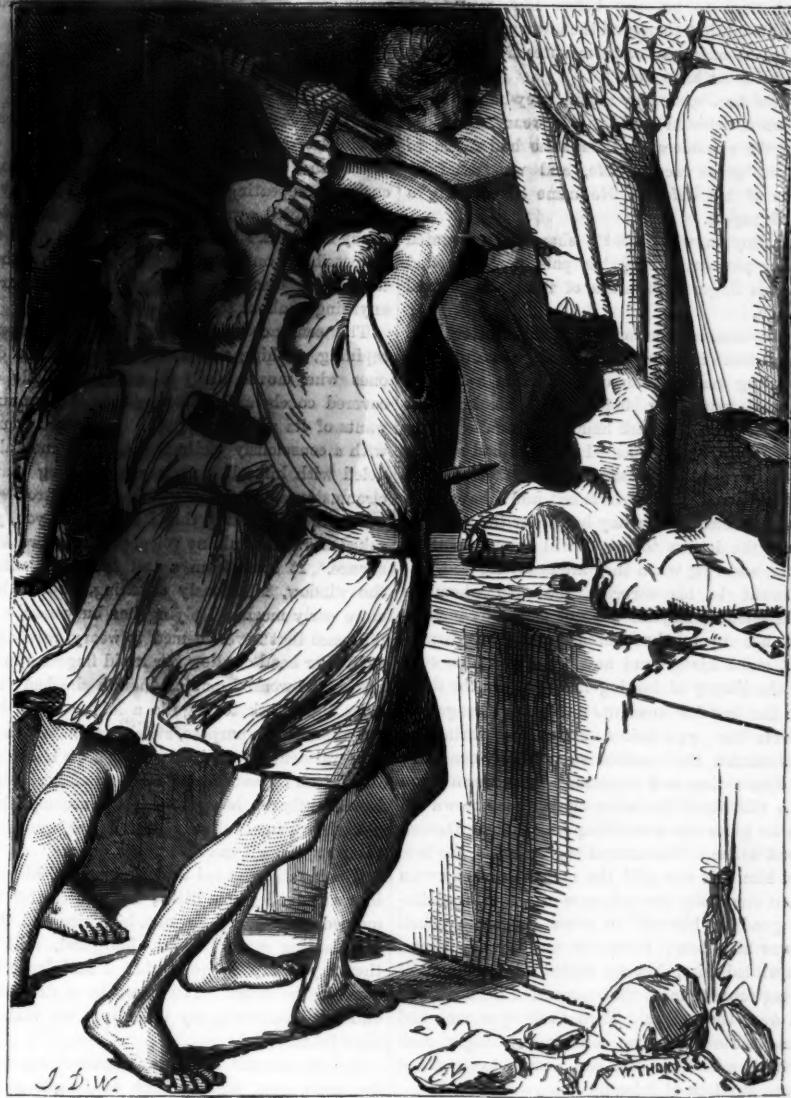
a woman's; perhaps I should say a lady's, for it is small and delicate enough. For what purpose does this unknown feminine write to him, a wealthy old bachelor? Can it be anything in the matrimonial line—a widow, with sinister designs? Pugh! that is simply absurd." Here he tossed the letter indignantly on the desk. "After all, it is only some begging-letter trick, and I am giving myself needless apprehension, as usual. Mark, old fellow, clever as you have proved yourself in some things, you are little better than an idiot."

He rose from his chair, poked the fire in a vigorous way, that sent a rain of red cinders over the fender, then took a few hasty strides about the room, with his hands clasped behind him.

"I must be out of sorts, this afternoon," he said, stopping before his uncle's desk, and again taking up the letter, which seemed to possess a sort of fascination for him. "Do what I will, my thoughts still run in the same current. It is the old bugbear—fear of that family coming between me and the future for which I am working. Strange, I cannot divest myself of a certain impression about this letter,—that it has something to do with my Uncle Robert. I have also an idea about the handwriting, but, unluckily, it is only an idea, and I want certainty. If I could only be sure!"

His white fingers toyed nervously with the letter, and his glance wandered to the quaintly-carved timepiece on the mantel, as he added, "I don't expect him this half hour; I would venture, if I could do it without bungling. But there is the risk, and after all it may be worth nothing; the governor has such crotchetts about his letters, if he finds that one has been tampered with, he will never rest until he unearths the culprit. Still, it is strange, and I have my suspicions: if I could only get a glance at the contents! Can I do it? Yes! and if I bungle I must destroy—"

At that moment there was a few knock at the



(Drawn by J. D. WATSON.)

"Honour and wealth to the boldest hand."—p. 405.

door. A shade of vexation passed over the young man's face as he said, "Come in," to the unwelcome intruder, at the same time dropping the letter and applying himself to the study of a ledger which chanced to be open before him, muttering between his teeth, "Confound the interruption, whatever it is! it may take some minutes from the half hour, and I must have time."

The door was opened by a thin, grey-haired man, with a worn, dejected face, and a weary, spiritless stoop of the shoulders, as though he had failed to win in the great race of life, and was painfully conscious of his defeat. He came in carrying a bundle of papers.

"Well, Royton, what is it?" sharply interrogated the junior partner, lifting his pale eyebrows and running his finger down a line of figures in affected abstraction.

"I want some instructions about these letters, Mr. Mark, and there is a consignment of goods for—"

The young master interrupted him in a tone of ill-concealed irritability, holding out his hand for the papers, which the clerk handed to him. "Very strange, Mr. Royton, I expected that you had already received all necessary instructions connected with your department. My uncle is out, and I have more than enough business on my hands for the present; but leave the letters to me, I will attend to them presently, and ring when they are ready for you."

Somewhat to his surprise, the man whom he had addressed as Royton did not show any inclination to act upon the summary hint of dismissal, but stood his ground and looked at him, even taking the liberty of leaning his elbow on the desk. Within the last few moments a singular change had come over the grey-haired clerk, the shrinking, nervous manner that seemed so painfully conscious under observation, and sometimes drew down upon him the ridicule of his fellow-clerks, was thrown off, and in its place was something which Mark Danson could not define. The altered expression of the face puzzled him. It was still the manner of a nervous man, but one under the influence of powerful excitement, goading himself to some desperate effort. Mark was at a loss; it was an entirely new phase, and mystified him, but he folded his arms as if gathering force to meet the unexpected demand, and leaned over the ledger. Then their eyes met, and for some seconds the two continued gazing at each other, such a look as does not pass between those who have any link of friendly fellowship.

"Mr. Mark Danson," faltered the old clerk.

Still resting on his folded arms, Mark answered, slowly, "Mr. Giles Royton, it strikes me that, as business men, we are wasting time to little purpose. Will you tell me the meaning of this singular pantomime?"

"I will," was the response. He bent down and whispered a few words in the young man's ear.

Their effect on the listener was startling. He recoiled, then bounded from his seat, and with a smothered imprecation, caught Royton by the arm, a dull heat kindling in his face, where the colour so rarely came. At last Mark Danson was moved.

CHAPTER II.

COMING TROUBLES.

"How unpleasant," murmured the querulous voice of Robert Crawton, as he turned irritably on his couch and made a feeble effort to rearrange his cushions, repeating, "how unpleasant to have Mrs. Crawton called away, just when she was attending to my comforts. I take care to give as little trouble as possible; but I notice it is invariably the case, that these disagreeable interruptions occur when anything is about to be done for me."

The sentence ended in a sigh of discontented repining, nothing new to the two or three devoted ones who moved daily about that little chintz-covered couch, and ministered to the innumerable wants of its ailing occupant. He looked round him with a consciously victimized air, and mentally consoled with himself as a much-enduring martyr to circumstances over which he had no control.

"Is there anything that I can do for you, papa?" asked a sweet feminine voice, suddenly breaking the silence. It came from a tall fair girl, seated near the window, laboriously stitching, as she had sat since early morning, plying her busy needle with a diligence that never seemed to weary, rarely pausing to lift her head or allow her rapid fingers a moment's rest. She worked, not as though she had taken up some light task to beguile a leisure hour, but like one who has a purpose, stitching on with a sort of desperate energy of determination, as if she realised that much depended on the work of her hands, and had silently set herself a task to accomplish within a certain time. She repeated her question—"Is there anything I can do for you, papa?"

The invalid glanced towards her, and his puckered brows relaxed just a little; but the fretful look remained, and when he spoke, his voice had the same complaining wail, "What, Margaret, still sewing there? you are so quiet that I had forgotten you were in the room. You must be a decided mope, child, or you would try to enliven me with a little cheerful talk."

For an instant there was a pained expression in the girl's eyes, and a touch of heightened colour drifted into her pale face. But it passed quickly, and there was no sign of agitation in her low, calm voice as she said, "I am hurried with my work, papa; it must be finished by four o'clock to-day. I did not talk, because I had nothing cheerful to talk about. But you have not told me if I can do anything for you."

"Yes, my dear, you may get me a little fresh

toast-and-water, and perhaps you might manage to make my cushions a trifle more comfortable; though I know you will not do it like your mother. Margaret, you fall far beneath her in the qualities of a good nurse."

The girl did what she was desired, saying, quietly, "You are right, papa, I fall beneath my mother in many good qualities, among the rest, patient endurance. I have more of the iron power of resistance in me, and am not so good and amiable; for such things always seem to harden me, and I feel compelled to say or do something to mark my sense of the injustice."

The invalid put up his wasted hands in a feeble, expostulating way. "Margaret, you seem now to overpower me with words. This is generally the way, my dear, you either talk too much or too little; and sometimes, as now, I cannot quite follow your meaning."

He raised himself on his elbow as he spoke, and his eyes seemed to search his daughter's face in some anxiety as he waited for her answer.

She caught the look, and her own grew troubled, as she said with deepening colour, "Papa, I would rather not pursue this subject; but I will explain as you wish me. I mean the little unconscious tyrannies which we are all too apt to exercise over those who love us best, and therefore bear most from us—those over whom we have the greatest power. These are small wounds to talk of, but I think they are harder to bear than great ones, for there is less shield against them; and this is what I meant when I said that I was not good and amiable like my mother. I could not go on as she does, bearing everything so meekly, without a word of complaint. No, I am not like her."

Fair Margaret Crawton spoke in the tone of quiet decision so characteristic of her, but she bowed her stately neck, as though she felt there was something humiliating in the confession, "that she was not like her mother." And tears welled up slowly under her long veiling lashes, but were not suffered to fall. It needed nothing more to show how gentle Mrs. Crawton was reverenced by her child.

The invalid sighed as he caught the expression of the bending face.

"That is true, Margaret. You have something of my temper. I have recognised it often. The old spirit that belongs to our family. The same which has kept your uncle Dan and I enemies for years. If we had been of a more yielding race, we should long since have made up our quarrel. Strange, I was dreaming about him last night—a dream that travelled back a long way, for I thought we were at school together, and Dan had been thrashing one of the bigger boys for calling me names and cheating me at marbles. He is my only brother, and I like to recall these rare instances of his affection. When the soil is barren, we think the more of any stray

blossoms that may chance to crop out. Looking back now through our divided lives, I think it a good thing to keep fresh those memories; it gives me gentler thoughts of my brother, and may help me to forget his hardness to me and mine."

At that moment they were startled by the sharp slamming of a door, followed by the shuffle of feet in the passage and the sound of loud talking. Mr. Crawton writhed on his couch, and looked inquiringly at his daughter. His nervous system was morbidly sensitive, and harsh sounds distressed him to a painful degree. All the household were aware of his peculiarity, and accustomed to respect it.

"What is the meaning of that noise, Margaret? Can all that loud talking have anything to do with your mother's visitor? I have not yet been informed why she left me in such a hurry. Listen! That must be Chriss, and it sounds as if she was getting angry. Open the door, my dear; it is not pleasant to be kept in ignorance of what is going on."

Before Margaret could obey, the door was opened from the outside, and her mother stood on the threshold with raised forefinger, pointing apprehensively to the couch where the sick man lay in such a position that he could not see her, being partially hidden behind a large screen which had been thoughtfully improvised to protect him from draughts. From her mother's agitated manner, and the wistful, anxious glance which accompanied the movement of her hand, Margaret understood that there was something unpleasant to be kept from her father's knowledge, at least for the present, until the weight of trouble, whatever it might be, had been broken, and the effect softened by the gentle influence which was always on the alert to spare him pain and annoyance. For no sorrow fell upon his sheltered head that could possibly be withheld by the strong, tender heart, that was ever ready to interpose itself as his shield—the mighty spirit of woman's love, which, like some guardian angel, was keeping silent, ceaseless watch over his life.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT PASSED BETWEEN THEM.

GILES ROYTON shook the grasp from his arm, and recoiled a few paces. Unwonted passion had for the present forced him out of his habit of weak submission to others. He had come into Mark Danson's presence that afternoon, goaded by the pressure of a wrong, the knowledge of which had been worn in his heart for months like a corroding sore. As he stood there, secretly chafing under the cool contempt of the man who had injured him and his, the slumbering fire within him suddenly leaped into flame, and excitement hurried on the crisis for which he had been waiting and watching. He was there as Mark Danson's accuser; but, from the force of habit, and a certain degree of personal fear, of which he could

not divest himself, he seemed to shrink before the passion he had roused.

The younger man was not slow to follow up his advantage, and take the higher ground, perhaps as a shelter for himself.

"What does this mean, Giles Royton?" he asked, fiercely. "Are you going mad?"

"Not unless you have driven me, though goodness knows there has been enough to do it. Ask my daughter Eleanor."

"Your daughter!" repeated the other, with sullen anger. "What has she to do with me?"

A vivid rush of colour burned for an instant in the face of the grey-haired clerk, then faded out, leaving it as pale as Mark's own, and his hands caught the edge of the desk, grasping it with straining vehemence that made the veins stand out like knots of purple cords. He spoke in a choking voice, "This is worse than I reckoned on, even from you, Mr. Danson, since you can turn round and ask me that question in cold blood, knowing what I know of your miserable secret. Would to Heaven I could answer that Eleanor is nothing to you, for in spite of the difference in our worldly positions, I am not proud to own you as her husband."

"I begin to fear that this is really a case of mental derangement," commented the young master, with a desperate effort at coolness, opening his pen-knife and commencing a savage attack on a quill-pen. "Mr. Royton, I should suspect that you had been drinking, if I did not know that it is not one of your sins. But perhaps you were unfortunate at play last night; that may account for all."

It was a cruel shaft, and cruelly aimed; for gambling was Giles Royton's bane—the one concealed vice which was at the root of all his troubles. Chance had revealed this to Mark Danson, also that the man lived in dread of his secret coming to the knowledge of Daniel Crawton, knowing that it would be followed by immediate discharge from his situation, for the old merchant was rigidly scrupulous about the morals of those whom he employed. For purposes of his own, the wily Mark had taken some trouble to make himself master of circumstances, and had been mean enough to use his knowledge as an instrument of power over the unfortunate man; consenting to keep his secret only on certain conditions of humiliating subjection, which he never failed to exact when occasion required. About that time he was introduced to Eleanor Royton, the clerk's only daughter, to whom he had believed himself warmly attached. Without the knowledge of her father, he pursued the acquaintance, and, two years previous to the opening of our story they had been privately married—a step which he now bitterly regretted, for mercenary reasons. It was in vain that the young wife urged him to the fulfilment of his long-deferred promise, to acknowledge their marriage; he had made up his mind to delude

her with false hopes, though he knew that grief for the change in him was already wearing down her health. The discovery that she had carried out her threat, and betrayed their secret to her father, disturbed him more than he was willing to admit. He spoke again in his cold, mocking way, still chipping his pen in a merciless fashion.

"I hope your losses have not been very heavy, Mr. Royton. If a ten-pound note will be any avail, it is at your service; but understand," he added with emphasis, "there must be strict confidence between us on all points, without exception—yes, all points," he repeated, slowly, feeling the edge of the blade as he closed his pen-knife, and looking keenly into the agitated face of his companion.

"This is like you, Mark Danson, to add insult to injury; then offer a man money, as though his feelings were so much merchandise. But you mistake me; I would not touch your gold now to save me from starving. Poor, fallen, as I may be, I am still man enough for that. I want nothing from you but justice to my daughter and your wife—Eleanor Danson."

"She has never borne that name," said Mark, starting as if the sound had stung him.

"But you know that it is legally hers."

"Well, suppose it is; and granting the truth of all you say, Mr. Royton, what do you wish me to do?"

"Acknowledge the marriage to your uncle, and take your wife home."

Mark smiled and showed his regular white teeth, as he answered, "Very good, most considerate of fathers-in-law; but it can't be done—at least for the present. Hark! that must be the governor," he cried, with a sudden start, adding, under his breath, "confound it! the half hour is up, and I have lost my chance of seeing the letter. Royton, get back to your desk at once; it will not look well for my uncle to see you wasting time here."

But the clerk did not stir.

"Be reasonable," continued Mark, excitedly, catching his arm as the step drew nearer; "unless you wish to ruin her cause and yours. I will see Eleanor myself to-night."

"You promise?"

"Yes; in the meantime be discreet, and keep my secret as I have kept yours. Two years ago, a word from me would have expelled you from the firm, and would do it now. Quick, my uncle's suspicions are easily excited."

He hurried him out of the office, calling after him, in a loud business tone, "Get through the other correspondence, Royton; I will see to these letters myself."

Just then the door opened and admitted Daniel Crawton, a tall old man with iron-grey hair, deep, far-seeing grey eyes, and a stern, decisive cast of face, clearly cut and strongly lined.

With a simple, "Well, Mark," he walked straight to his desk, and as though he had expected to find it there, pounced at once upon the letter which had caused his nephew such uneasiness.

Watching him closely from where he stood, Mark saw his face change and his hand tremble, as he glanced at the address on the envelope. And his curiosity was further excited by hearing his uncle murmur to himself, "Something has happened; it is her handwriting. I could swear to it among a thousand!"

CHAPTER IV.

IN POSSESSION.

WHILE MRS. CRAWTON was holding silent communication with her daughter on the threshold of the parlour door, and Mr. Crawton was irritably insisting on his right to be informed of what was going on, a different scene was enacting in another part of the house. The entrance passage of the Crawtons' house terminated in a small back parlour, at the open door of which, firmly planted on a chair, as though it were an entrenched position, which he meant to hold in defiance of all opposition, sat a short, stout man, with broad, burly shoulders, which he shrugged at intervals in an unpleasantly suggestive manner. All his faculties were on the alert, and his utmost capacity of vision seemed strained to the necessity of keeping vigilant watch on the movements of an active antagonist, who had taken up a defiant position in front. She was a tall woman, with a development of bone and muscle and a towering height of stature, that was secretly respected by the short man in the chair. She had quick bright eyes, a sharp tongue and a rugged brown face, where Time seemed to have notched a register of dates. This was Chriss, who represented in herself the entire domestic establishment of the Crawtons, being sole housekeeper and servant. She had begun life in the service of Mrs. Crawton's mother, as nursemaid. Her present mistress had been the baby under her care. That was perhaps the reason why she had singled her from all the rest as an object for especial devotion, clinging to her with a fidelity that partook of the spirit of the old days of chivalry. When the young lady married, Chriss still followed her fortunes, nursed her children as they came, and finally, when dark days of trouble fell on the family, and adversity saw Mrs. Crawton with broken health and premature threads of silver in her soft brown hair, the humble follower was still there with her unflinching courage and robust physical strength, to help to lighten the burden and soften the hard realities of her lot. This seemed to have become the purpose for which the good creature lived. It was the working of the beautiful law of compensation, by which the all-merciful Father accommodates the burden to the shoulders of his children, and tempers the storm-winds to their human needs and weaknesses. This was the anta-

gonist, upon whom the short man sat scowling suspiciously, looking round him with a kind of covert apprehension, as though he expected some assault, and was not certain which would be the point chosen for attack. The appearance of Chriss at that moment, was certainly sufficient to justify his suspicions. She had come up hurriedly from the kitchen, with her sleeves tucked above her elbows and specks of flour adhering to her bare arms. There was hostile purpose in her eyes, as she stood grasping the handle of a broom, which the man rightly conjectured would become a very formidable weapon in those sinewy hands.

"Ferocious female," he growled, with a wavy motion of his hands, and a watchful look in his eyes, seizing the first chance of making himself heard when Chriss stopped speaking for want of breath—"ferocious female," he repeated, "don't you know this violence is against the law, and you could be taken up for trying to break the peace, beside insulting an officer doing nothing but his duty? I'm one of the men in possession, and I've a right to stop here till further orders, and stop I will."

"Oh, indeed; will you?" answered Chriss, in a tone of exasperating contempt, accompanied by an unpleasantly suggestive movement of her broom. "And you've the impudence to call yourself in possession, after sneaking into respectable people's houses, and sitting yourself down on respectable people's chairs, without saying, 'By leave,' but it takes two to make a bargain, and—"

He interrupted her. "I tell you it's the law—a queer thing for you to meddle with, 'specially if you go insulting one of its officers."

"One of its officers!" repeated the wrathful defender of the family interests, measuring him with a glance that foreboded danger.

"Yes; can't you understand that we've a writ against your master, put in for the rent, and it aint no earthly use you trying on this game of violence; for if you mean mischief with that ere weapon," he hastily added, keeping a prudent watch on the movements of the enemy, "all I've got to say is, that it'll be the worse for you and the people of the house."

But, undismayed by his warning, and in defiance of the law and its representative, Chriss seemed bent upon a measure of forcible ejection, and there is little doubt that things would not have gone on very smoothly for the man in possession, if a timely interruption had not occurred at that critical moment when Chriss was mentally matching her own strength against his.

Unheard by the excited woman, a step came softly along the passage, and a delicate white hand was laid upon the arm that held the threatening broom.

It was Mrs. Crawton's low voice that spoke hurriedly in her ear. "Chriss, this violence will do no

good. I asked you to go quietly down-stairs. I am sorry that you have not done so."

Chriss looked at her mistress, with the fire slowly dying out from her eyes. At the same instant her hand was drawn into a clasp, and she felt the soft fingers clinging round her own, as the low voice again whispered in her ear—

"Dear old Chriss, I know you mean well, but it does no good. The man must be left to do his duty in his own way. Leave him to me, he will be civil enough, if he is not angered. Now I want you to put me pen, ink, and paper in the back parlour. I am going to write a letter, you can guess to whom. It is our last resource, Chriss; the only hope of our deliverance from this new trouble. Has Hugh come in yet?"

"No, ma'am."

Chriss prepared to obey her mistress without deigning another glance in the direction of her enemy. At that moment a second man made his appearance on the scene. He came from the rear of the house, with

a pen behind his ear, and an open memorandum book in his hand, as though he had been taking notes. It was the sheriff's officer. He was going towards the room where the invalid Mr. Crawton lay; but the anxiously-observant wife touched his shoulder, and whispered a few words. He turned and bowed with a politeness that went sadly with his present occupation and his air of decayed respectability. At a sign from his companion he stopped, and they conferred together for a few minutes. At the end he said aloud—

"Never mind, Simmons; it mayn't be quite the strict letter of business, but we mustn't be too hard on the poor people. Let the women have their own way, as far as we can, and keep a civil tongue. It's like oiling the locks as we go on, they open all the easier, and it saves trouble in the end."

To this bit of philosophical advice, a gruff monosyllable was the only answer vouchsafed by the surly listener. *(To be continued.)*

FAITHFUL JERRY WAGSTAFF; OR, THE DANGER OF PRACTICAL JOKING.

A STORY IN TWO PARTS. BY JOHN G. WATTS, AUTHOR OF "PICTURES OF ENGLISH LIFE," ETC.

PART II.

 WENTY minutes after the compact had been entered into between Arthur and George Drake, young gentlemen, on the one part, and Jerry Wagstaff, groom, on the other, Mercer Lodge was sighted, and soon reached. Fortunately, Mr. Drake was not in the way, or it is very likely that after all he would have discovered something had been amiss with the mare, and have put a few very awkward questions.

There are people who act as a wet blanket upon everybody and everything they come near; take all the joy and life out of the most light-hearted and enthusiastic; who go about prophesying nothing but misfortune and woe—people who cannot extract pleasure from anything. A bright May day, garlanded in beauty by the hand of the Most High, has no charm for them; a ramble through the hay-fields of June produces only headache; the song of a bird, whose little heart has been attuned to ceaseless melody by the Father of all good, dins them to death. Such are only to be pitied. They make this world a vale of tears indeed, and nothing else, shutting themselves out from participation in those innocent enjoyments which in mercy are as free to the poorest hind that ever toiled from early morn to dewy eve, as to the proudest noble in all the land. Upon the other hand, there are those who inspire everybody and everything with confidence, from a grey-bearded man to a grey-whiskered cat—people who come into

your house like a ray of sunshine. Nobody avoids them; the dog doesn't bark after the first visit, but wags his tail as they take a seat, and says his "how do you do?" as plain as may be; baby's eyes sparkle at their approach, and he begins to caper and crow, and leans towards them, as if they were old friends, and had wandered through babyland together. Instead of damping, freezing, and dispiriting, they warm you if you are cold, soothe you if you are sad, tickle you if you are mumpish, and give you new confidence if you are in doubt. Such a person, you will easily see, was Mr. Drake. As a consequence, he had not been in his sick friend's room a quarter of an hour before the patient had got a twinkle in the eye, which for days had looked as misty and dull as a mirror breathed upon; and before he left in the evening he had coaxed back a hopeful frame of mind, and finally left the patient very much more the better for his one visit than he had been for six calls of the doctor, aided by as many pills and potions.

Mr. Drake was, of course, delighted to see the boys, and they were equally glad to see him. They soon got to work, planning amusement for the approaching Christmas-tide. There were to be rare merry-makings; acting charades, and Christmas-trees. The latter George and Arthur did not care for, but their sister had some young friends who did. The lesson taught by the runaway steed seemed to have worked a complete conversion in the boys, and Jerry had never known so much peace

during the holidays for years. The Drakes not only held their revels at home, but attended revels out, and "all went merry as a marriage bell."

Exactly three weeks and four days from the boys' arrival at home, an incident occurred at Mercer Lodge, which we think will prove of considerable interest to the reader.

"My dear," said Mr. Drake, to his gentle partner, on the day mentioned, "we must not waste much time if we are to catch the 4.15 train to London. The Thompsons will be greatly disappointed if we do not dine with them to-day, and spend the evening too."

Mrs. Drake urged that she did not feel very well. "Never mind, Bessie," observed her husband; "you'll be all the better for the change. A little rousing is good for most people."

Mrs. Drake thought she had had more than a little rousing lately.

"Nonsense, my dear. Why you'd die of the dumps, but for the gentle fillips I now and then surprise you with."

She was about to offer further opposition.

"There, I won't hear a word. Get on your bonnet, and let's be off." (Ladies *wore* bonnets in those days.)

Mrs. Drake, with a smile, gave in, quitted the apartment, and quickly returned ready for the journey.

"Jerry," said the master of the house, as he stood pulling on his gloves, "where are the boys?"

"Out on Blackheath a-skating, I think, sir."

"Well, when they return, tell them that it is my desire they should remain in this evening."

"Yes, sir."

"Cook and Mary are going to the Greenwich Lecture Hall to some entertainment, and you will have to take care of the place. Lock up early. Miss Drake, who will be home presently, will be able to see any friend who may chance to call."

"Yes, sir."

"And, Jerry, give Peggy a look in once or twice in the course of the evening. She seems to have caught cold. P'raps you'd better let her have a mash by-and-by."

"Yes, sir."

"There, that's all I've to say."

The groom opened the door, and his master and mistress took their departure.

Fanny was the first to return, and she expressed no surprise at finding her parents were gone to town; but when her brothers came in they seemed very much disappointed and surprised too. They said that there was but a "duffing" evening before them, with nobody but their sister in the house for company.

"A very pretty compliment you are paying me, certainly," said the young lady, bouncing from behind a window-curtain, where she had been hiding.

The surprise set her brothers laughing.

"You're a pair of good-for-nothing boys, that's

what you are," she continued. "Who invented the charade the other evening that was so successful?"

"Well, yes, we know all about that," returned Arthur; "but we can't go acting charades to empty benches."

"Of course not," echoed George.

"Well, there's one thing we can do, gentlemen; we can try over the songs and duets we are to sing at the Breezers' on Tuesday."

The boys did not see it. She might do as she chose. Evening descended, and Arthur, after vainly endeavouring for an hour and a half to manufacture an omnibus out of cardboard, suddenly pitched his materials into the fire, and calling upon George, who was deep in "Robinson Crusoe," to shut up the book, and demanding that Fanny should shut up that precious piano, informed both that he'd hit upon a capital idea for making the evening as jolly a one as they had enjoyed all through the season. He communicated something in an undertone to George, whose face instantly lit up, and he exclaimed—

"First rate!" Then he as suddenly looked grave again, and said, "But Jerry mayn't like it."

"Nonsense!" returned the other; "it's quite harmless. It can't do anybody any hurt, I'm sure."

Then he whispered something in his sister's ear, who laughed and said, "No, it is not at all proper."

Thereupon Arthur once more asserted, in the most contemptuous manner, that girls were most awful bores, and never any hand at promoting fun; to give a contradiction to which Fanny there and then acquiesced in his proposal, and all three left the room.

As that vigilant Police-constable O 124 was going his round, at about a quarter to ten that night, on reaching Mercer Lodge, his attention was attracted by a flash of light, which suddenly fell across his face, and then instantly went out. He approached the fence cautiously, and detected a rustling among the shrubs, and shortly afterwards heard some people conversing in whispers. He was very sharp of hearing, was Police-constable O 124, and, as you may be sure, he opened his ears to their very widest.

"It's all right," said one.

"How do we enter?" asked another.

"At the back. He'll have the door open in two minutes."

"Very good," thought the officer to himself. "I understand your little bit of business;" and away he stole, as softly as a mouse, to seek assistance.

At five minutes to ten, as Jerry sat dozing over the kitchen fire, he was suddenly aroused by feeling his arms seized from behind, and before he could utter a word he was securely pinioned. When he opened his eyes, three rather short but sturdy ruffians withal, with masks on their faces, had surrounded him. One, pointing a pistol at his head, warned him, in a thick, husky voice, that if he gave any alarm his life would pay for it. The poor fellow, with tears in his eyes, besought them.

"Oh, gentlemen—gentlemen! whatever do you want?"

"Treasure," was the reply.

"He doesn't live here. It's some mistake. Oh, do untie my arms, if you please. You've come to the wrong house."

"We want money and plate."

"Oh, we've no money on the premises; master always writes cheques; and as to our plate, it's all nickel. I knowed you'd made a mistake. It's No. 6, higher up, where there's so much property."

"Silence, fellow, or I'll blow your brains out!" said another of the ruffians. "Tell us where everything is kept."

"Oh, gentlemen—gentlemen! don't, pray don't! It'll ruin me who 'ave a fifteen years' character. The house is all under my charge, and there's nobody but the children at home. If you must rob the place, come when master and mistress are within. Oh, thieves! thieves! thieves!"

"Another cry like that, and you're a dead man," said the smallest of the burglars.

At that instant a loud knock came at the door. The robbers became alarmed, and rushed up-stairs.

"Thieves! thieves! murder!" bawled the groom, endeavouring all the while to break away from his fastenings, and thumping and bumping about most clumsily. The knocking was repeated. "Murder! murder!" bawled Jerry, at the top of his voice.

Then came a great crash, succeeded by the sound of heavy feet in the hall. Cries and beseechings for mercy, and calls for Jerry followed. By a super-human effort the good and faithful servant tore the back out of the chair to which he was fastened, uprooted one of its legs, and freed his own two. In a minute he was up-stairs, when lo! there stood a couple of policemen with the three burglars in custody.

"Oh, Jerry—good Jerry!" cried they, directly he came in sight, "tell the policemen who we are."

The masks were off their faces, and behold, the thieves had suddenly changed into Miss Drake and her two brothers.

Before Jerry had time to reply, a sound of footsteps behind was followed by the appearance of no less a personage than the master of the house. He was white with alarm. He stopped short with an exclamation on his lips, looked in a puzzled manner for a second or two, first at the children, then at the constables.

"What in the name of common sense does all this mean?" he asked.

"Oh, pa!" came from the trio in concert, "pray forgive us; we were only in fun, and did not mean any harm."

The officer now detailed how he had overheard what he supposed to be burglars planning an attack upon the premises, and how, having sought assistance, he had come up just in time to hear cries of murder;

how, after knocking in vain, fearing life to be in danger, he had forced the door.

"To your rooms this instant!" cried Mr. Drake, "and be thankful that your dear mother has not returned with me to-night. This freak of yours might have cost her her life."

In vain did the boys plead for their sister, stating that they alone were to blame. Their papa would speak no word of forgiveness, and they were all compelled to retire at once. When they were gone, he thanked the constables for their activity, and gave them five shillings, and some refreshment suitable to the inclement nature of the weather, whereupon they wished him a happy new year, and took their departure. Jerry was praised by his master for the faithful manner in which he had fulfilled his trust under such trying circumstances, and, just as kings in olden times were wont to dub knights upon the battle-field, the scene of their exploits, Mr. Drake raised his servant's wages on the spot. The next day, the three culprits were called into the drawing-room, and severely lectured. Their father concluded his admonitions thus:—

"By your conduct you jeopardised the life of a good servant, for the pistols you got hold of were both loaded and capped; in the next place, you brought about the destruction of property I greatly valued—a china vase and a statuette had been smashed by the police in forcing the door—and, furthermore, what the consequences would have been to your dear mother, if she had not been induced by Mrs. Thompson to prolong her visit, I really do not know. Your disobedience, therefore, in spite of all your contrition, which I do you the credit to believe to be quite sincere, must not go unpunished. Not another party shall either of you go to this season, nor will I have another merry-making within these walls. In addition to this you will not receive your usual Christmas presents."

Fanny and George both sobbed aloud, and Arthur found it no easy task to suppress his feelings. All three felt that they were being treated severely, but at the same time they could not dispute the justice of the sentence.

When Mrs. Drake had returned, and learned the particulars of their misbehaviour, she also admonished them, but immediately afterwards set to work endeavouring to coax her husband into remitting at least a portion of the sentence. Like a wise man, however, he was not to be moved. Thus the holidays, which had commenced so merrily, ended most gloomily; and our young friends returned to school sadder, and, as it turned out subsequently, wiser than they had come home. From that hour they played no more practical jokes. All three are now grown up, two of them married, and they never visit Mercer Lodge at Christmas-tide without making Jerry a seasonal present, and joking him about that night when the thieves got into the house.